

Child Safeguarding Statement

1. **BetterCareTM Mental Health Services Ltd** is a comprehensive mental health service providing counselling, psychotherapy, psychology, psychological assessments and psychiatry to children under 18 years old.

2. **Nature of service and principles to safeguard children from harm**

BetterCare will:

- Ensure to safeguard the children who avail of our services.
- Treat every child who attends our service should be treated with respect and dignity.
- Fully comply with its statutory obligations under the Children First Act 2015 and other relevant legislation relating to the protection and welfare of children
- Be committed to child-centred practice in all our work with children.
- Fully believe children have a right to be heard, listened to and taken seriously. Taking account of their age and understanding, they should be consulted and involved in all matters and decisions that may affect their lives. We fully respect confidentiality requirements in dealing with child protection matters.
- Strive to work in partnership with families, while recognising the welfare of the child as paramount. We will liaise with parents where appropriate to ensure the safety of the child at all times.
- Consult Parents/carers in matters that concern their children without breaking the confidentiality of the child and therapist therapeutic relationship as set out in our procedures.
- Will work together with agencies and professionals to safeguarding childing knowing it is a multidisciplinary activity.

3. **Risk Assessment**

As part of BetterCareTM's commitment to child safety, we have identified potential risks that could affect children under our care, particularly in the remote and in-person environments where our freelance staff operate. Our child safeguarding policies are designed to mitigate these risks, ensuring a safe and supportive environment for all young clients.

Inappropriate Contact During Online Sessions:

- **Risk:** During remote sessions, there is a potential risk of inappropriate behaviour or communication between freelance staff and children.
- **Mitigation:** All online interactions are conducted through secure, monitored platforms with strict professional boundaries in place. Freelance staff are trained in child safeguarding practices and appropriate conduct.

Unauthorised Access to Sessions or Information:

- **Risk:** The risk of unauthorised individuals gaining access to remote therapy sessions or sensitive information concerning child clients.

- **Mitigation:** Secure logins, password protection, and encrypted communication platforms are used to prevent unauthorised access. Freelance staff are trained in data protection and confidentiality procedures, and children's information is stored in compliance with data protection laws.

Unsuitable Physical Environment for In-Person Sessions:

- **Risk:** For in-person sessions, there is a potential risk of the physical environment being unsuitable or unsafe for children (e.g., hazards, lack of supervision, or poorly maintained facilities).
- **Mitigation:** All physical locations used for in-person services are inspected for child safety, ensuring compliance with relevant health and safety standards. Freelance staff working in-person are trained in child safeguarding, and the environment is tailored to meet the needs of child clients, with appropriate supervision and safety measures.

Lack of Clear Reporting Channels for Concerns:

- **Risk:** Children or their guardians may not know how to report concerns or incidents of abuse or inappropriate behaviour.
- **Mitigation:** Clear reporting mechanisms are established for both remote and in-person services. Children and their guardians are informed of how to report concerns, and freelance staff are trained to recognise and report signs of abuse or neglect immediately through the proper channels.

Inadequate Supervision of Freelance Staff:

- **Risk:** Freelance staff working remotely, or in-person may not be sufficiently supervised, leading to potential safeguarding concerns.
- **Mitigation:** All freelance staff undergo background checks, Garda vetting and have child safeguarding training. Supervision protocols, such as regular performance reviews and ongoing professional development, ensure compliance with safeguarding policies.

Emotional or Psychological Harm to the Child:

- **Risk:** Therapeutic interventions may unintentionally cause distress or harm to children if not handled sensitively.
- **Mitigation:** Freelance staff are trained in age-appropriate communication and therapeutic techniques tailored to the developmental needs of children. Any signs of distress are addressed immediately, and parents or guardians are informed of any concerns in the therapeutic process to help monitor the child's emotional well-being.

Inadequate Consent and Communication with Parents/Guardians:

- **Risk:** The lack of clear consent and communication with a child's parent/guardian could lead to misunderstandings or inappropriate sharing of information.
- **Mitigation:** Written consent is required from guardians for both remote and in-person therapy sessions. Freelance staff are trained to maintain open communication with guardians while upholding client confidentiality and ensuring informed consent.

Online Safety and Exposure to Inappropriate Content:

- **Risk:** Children may be exposed to inappropriate content or individuals online during remote sessions.
- **Mitigation:** All online sessions are conducted using secure, child-appropriate platforms. Direct access is given through the parent/guardian email address. Freelance staff are trained to monitor the child's online environment during sessions and ensure that no inappropriate content or individuals are present.

4. Procedures

Our Child Safeguarding Statement has been developed in line with requirements under the Children First Act 2015, *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (2017), and Tusla's *Child Safeguarding: A Guide for Policy, Procedure and Practice*. In addition to the procedures listed in our risk assessment, the following procedures support our intention to safeguard children while they are availing of our service:

- Procedure for the management of allegations of abuse or misconduct against workers/volunteers of a child availing of our service.
- Procedure for the safe recruitment and selection of workers and volunteers to work with children.
- Procedure for provision of and access to child safeguarding training and information, including the identification of the occurrence of harm.
- Procedure for the reporting of child protection or welfare concerns to Tusla.
- Procedure for maintaining a list of the persons (if any) in the relevant service who are mandated persons.
- Procedure for appointing a relevant person.

All procedures listed are available upon request.

5. Implementation

We recognise that implementation is an on-going process. BetterCare is committed to the implementation of this Child Safeguarding Statement and the procedures that support our intention to keep children safe from harm while availing of our service.

This Child Safeguarding Statement will be reviewed on 1st January 2025 or as soon as practicable after there has been a material change in any matter to which the statement refers.

Signed: *Neil Costello*

For queries, please contact Neil Costello, Relevant Person under the Children First Act 2015.